

Upper Darby, PA -- Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7) celebrated the Hindu holiday, Holi, with the UP (Uttar Pradesh) Association of Greater Philadelphia.

Holi is an annual Hindu holiday celebrating spring. Celebrated all over India since ancient times, it was originally an agricultural festival celebrating the arrival of spring. It is held on the day after the full moon in the Hindu month of Phalguna (early March) and traditionally commemorates various events in Hindu mythology. It is also considered a time of disregarding social norms. During Holi, Hindus attend a public bonfire, spray friends and family with colored powders and water (to rejoice in the colors and rebirth of spring), and participate in general merrymaking. "One of the things that I love most about Delaware County, and Upper Darby in particular, is its diversity of cultures," noted Joe at the event. "I am honored to be able to celebrate this Hindu holiday, which shows that no matter our culture or religion, we all can catch spring fever."

The festival of Holi commemorates the story in Hinduism involving an evil king named Hiranyakashipu. He forbade his son Prahlad from worshipping Vishnu, but Prahlad continued to do so. Getting angry with his son, Hiranyakashipu ordered Prahlad to sit on a pyre in the lap of the king's sister Holika, who was believed to be immune to fire. When the fire started, everyone watched in amazement as Holika was burnt to death, while Prahlad, who had prayed to Vishnu to keep him safe, survived without a scar to show for it. To mark this story, huge bonfires are lit to celebrate the burning of Holika and more importantly to mark the burning of self-conceit, selfishness, greed, lust, hatred. It is thus associated with a loosening of social restrictions. Holi thus bridges social gaps and brings people together: employees and employers, men and women, rich and poor, young and old.

"Holi teaches us a valuable lesson -- that we must cast aside the emotions and traits that keep us divided and instead rejoice in what makes us all the same," added Joe. "I wish all the children and families celebrating today a joyous holiday."

The celebration included song, dance, and a kids fancy dress show.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including*

*Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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